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AUTHOR Semlak, William; Shandrow, Kathy J.
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ABSTRACT

Poor delivery, artificial analysis, and unrealistic organization are all pointed to by critics of competitive tournament debate. The purpose of this study was to determine the relative ability of students with debate and nondebate training with regard to analysis, organization, and speaking skills. Ninety-four participants in the Bicentennial Youth Debates (BYD) Midwest Sectional Tournaments provided the subject population. Speech communication course background and general forensics and debate experience were assessed by questionnaire, and delivery, organization, and analysis were rated by judges on a five point interval scale. Despite limited generalizability of the study due to the failure of the BYD to utilize lay judges and the inability of researchers to determine interaction relationship between independent variables, results indicated that students with debate experience achieve high ratings in activities far removed from competitive school debate format. Forensics educators should therefore develop a transfer model of learning, utilizing formal debate training. (KS)

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An Empirical Analysis of Forensics Skills Employed by Participants in Bicentennial Youth Debates

By

William Semlak

and

Kathy J. Shandrow

of

Illinois State University

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The high school and college debate community has established a rather set pattern of educational experiences. Each year a national debate topic is selected and the majority of the students debate that topic throughout the year. While a number of schools have developed alternative forensics practices, the dominant debate activity still appears to be competitive tournament activity.[1] Increasingly, a number of people both within the debate community and the larger Speech Communication community have questioned some of the practices in competitive debate and even the educational justification of the activity as a whole. Theoretical articles have appeared in the journals that have outlined a variety of controversial aspects of the activity.[2] This debate paper will examine three important controversial aspects of debate training: delivery, analysis, and organization.

Critics of the activity often claim that debate is a poor training ground for public speaking. They observe a round of debate and witness a rapid fire mechanical form of delivery devoid of any audience appeal. From this "evidence" they conclude debate is a poor tool to teach public speaking. As Wayne Brockriede has concluded, the type of speaking that occurs in debate no longer reflects the type of speaking found in our legislative halls and courtrooms.[3] This "reality gap" for critics comprises "prima facie" evidence that debate is not a useful tool to teach public speaking and grounds for reduced support of the activity.

Next, critics examine the type of arguments that they hear in the rounds and launch an attack against the activity based on its unrealistic case construction. They contend no rational policy maker would consider, for example, marijuana legalization a land use policy. The critics argue that such debate practices as the squirrel cases, spread debating and alternative justification cases so taint the

debate process that the activity no longer reflects real world analysis. Again they conclude that such practices merit reduced support of the activity.

While observing debate rounds, critics also find a highly stylized argument structure. Debaters point and subpoint everything. Observing this practice critics suggest another fault of the activity. Real world speakers do not present material in such an artifical manner. Thus the reality gap between competitive school debate and real world debate includes at least three dimensions. Poor delivery, artificial analysis and unrealistic organization are all pointed to by critics as shortcomings of the educational activity.

Surprisingly, the teaching of analysis delivery and organization has often been cited as part of the pedagogical justifications of the activity. Numerous authors have addressed considerable attention to the particular ways in which each of these skills contributes to the overall value of school debating.[4] The question is then does the above mentioned criticism of debate raise serious questions as to the ability of the activity to achieve important educational goals? Some would say that it does and this dissatisfaction has resulted in debate program cutbacks and loss of support for the activity among some members of the Speech Communication field.

This observational evidence may be insufficient to establish that debate does not meet the three above mentioned objectives. While most debate coaches would admit that in round debate practices may leave something to be desired in terms of reflecting real world activities, they would contend that the overall educational justification of the activity is not denied by these facts. Many coaches would agree that the <u>real test</u> of debates' educational value comes when one attempts to assess the ability of students trained in debate to adapt to real world communication situations. The real question is do students with debate experience have better

analysis, organization and speaking skills in real world speaking situations than the skills possessed by students without such experience?

Unfortunately, scientific evidence answering this question is nonexistent. Forensics coaches have assembled volumes of testimonial evidence from successful public speakers attributing much of their success not only in public speaking but also in public life in general to aspects of debate training.[5] However, this evidence is often considered irrelevant by critics because of its non-scientific nature. A number of correlation studies linking debate training and various debate skills have also been attacked because study designs fail to account for important antecedent and intervening variables. This study will attempt to determine the relative ability of students with debate and non-debate training to demonstrate the successful use of the three above mentioned skills in a real world speaking format.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at the Bicentennial Youth Debates (BYD) Midwest Sectional Tournaments. There are several reasons to believe that this event represents a real world public speaking situation separate from the traditional tournament that debaters attend. First, the program was set up independently of traditional debate tournaments, including topics related to the American Issues Forum. In this respect students were forced to address topics with a much higher value orientation than utilized at a school debate tournament. Secondly, for the purpose of this study, we only included Extemporaneous and Persuasive Speaking. We believe that these events are removed from the normal debate format and are more typical of real speaking situations. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the BYD was

purportedly judged by members of civic organizations, community leaders, professional educators and a broad spectrum of interested citizens.[6] By selecting the BYD we hoped to conduct our study in an environment that the subjects would perceive as different from school debate in both the type of activity in which they would participate and in the criteria that would be used to evaluate them.

Three instruments were utilized to gather data at all sectional BYD tournaments in the Midwest. The instruments were sent to the tournament directors by Dr. Donald Shields, BYD Midwest Coordinator, requesting that each tournament director collect the data and return it to him. The instruments included: a participant's questionnaire which determined demographic information about the subjects including background in Speech Communication courses, dramatics, individual events and debate. A judge's questionnaire was also included which determined demographic information about judges including past experience judging debate and individual events and past experience in debate. Special copies of the official BYD ballots on NCR paper were included so that a copy of each ballot could be retained by the tournament director and returned to Dr. Shields with the other instruments.

This paper addresses three independent variables: Speech Communication course background, general forensics background, and debate background. Three dependent measures were selected because they appeared on the official BYD ballot. They included delivery, organization and analysis. Judges were asked to rate each contestant on a five point (1-5) interval scale. Importantly, each of these concepts was operationalized on the ballot in such a way to explain to the untrained judge what was expected. For example, delivery was operationalized as follows: "Has the contestant presented his position in a manner that is appealing to an audience and compelling to a listener?"

RESULTS

Overall, 94 subjects were included in the data analysis. Data from an additional 75 subjects who participated in the sectional BYD contests was returned in a form that was unable to be coded. The data in Table I indicates the breakdown of contestants in terms of past background in speech courses (defined as one or more courses at either the high school or college level), forensics participation (defined as any participation in debate, drama, individual events), and debate participation (defined as having participated in debate for one or more years). The data suggests, at least at the Midwest sectional BYD tournaments, that most participants had some previous exposure to speech, forensics or debate. This phenomenon made detailed analysis difficult due to the small number of subjects in some cells.

The data reported in Table 2 compares the ratings of the subjects in delivery, analysis and organization. The data was analyzed using the SPSS T-Test[7] between groups. Means for students with speech course background, forensics background and debate background were in every case higher than the means of those students without the background. For students with Speech Communication course backgrounds, their ratings in delivery were statistically ($p \leq .05$) higher than those without a Speech Communication course background. Also, students with a Speech Communication course background had a mean score in organization over .44 higher than the mean of those without a Speech Communication background which showed a strong tendency toward significance ($p \leq .10$).

Students with a forensics background had mean organization scores significantly higher ($p \leq .01$) than those without a forensics background. Students who reported a debate background had a significantly higher mean score on all three variables than did those who did not have any debate experience. As the table indicates, p values

for analysis were .02 with values .00 (rounded to two places) for both delivery and organization. A secondary analysis of students with debate experience was attempted to determine the relationship between the amount of experience in debate and their ratings in analysis, delivery and organization. Students with debate experience were divided into two groups (those with less than 2 years and those with more than 2 years of experience). T-Tests were run between the two groups. Values of .43 in analysis, 1.84 in delivery and -.48 in organization were obtained. These scores were not significant and the means for students with less debate experience were higher in delivery and analysis.

DISCUSSION

This study strongly confirms the ability of students with debate experience to achieve comparatively high ratings in analysis, delivery, and organization in activities far removed from the format of competitive school debate. This data suggests to us that forensics educators ought to formulate the theoretical justification of their activity around a transfer model of learning. Such a model would contend that their activity focuses the student on a variety of skills such as delivery, analysis, and organization, which are taught and developed within an artificial environment. This environment although non-reflective of the real world in which these skills are utilized forces the student to cognitively cope with these skills at a very high level. The student, however, also develops the ability to internalize the skills in such a way that he/she can transfer them to a real world situation in a form which is effective.

In addition, this study would seem to cast doubt on the evaluation of the critics of debate mentioned earlier in this paper. Their criticisms seem to flow

from a simulation model of learning that asserts that the educational justification of an activity flows from the ability of the experiences that an activity employs to mirror actual real world experiences. While such a justification may be appropriate for trade schools, and the like, it is difficult to imagine its utility when dealing with highly complex skills such as those utilized in Speech Communication. The results of this study indicate that the students with debate experience were significantly better able to employ the three communication skills utilized in this study than students without the experience.

Two factors, however, limit the generalizability of this study. First, the BYD established as an objective the use of a broad spectrum of judges. The utility of the results of this study is predicated on achievement of this objective. Our judge data indicated that the BYD was only about 50% successful in obtaining the desired judges. Just under 50% of the judges employed in this study were in some way connected with education. A full 51% rarely or never judge forensics events of any kind. Only 41% had ever judged a debate prior to the contest. However, 55% had participated in one form of forensics prior to this study. We ran a variety of Chi Square analyses, none of which detected any significant relationships between judging variables and any outcomes. However, the failure of the BYD to utilize more lay judges does weaken the conclusions of this study.

A second limitation of this study rests in its failure to determine interaction relationships between the three independent variables. Some debaters also could have had Speech Communication courses and the real success of a given group could be accounted for by a variety of factors. More importantly, in our secondary analysis of the students with debate experience we were unable to establish any differences between high and low levels of experience. This lends further support

to the notion that intervening factors may account for some of the differences between debaters and non-debaters.

We believe that our study is unique in that it was conducted in the field and designed in such a way that it could be conducted within the normal functioning of the BYD. We believe that the subjects and judges were unaware that the study was being conducted because they were led to believe that the forms that they completed were part of the BYD procedures. It is our belief that more field research in forensics should be conducted to ascertain how students with forensics training perform in non-debate activities. We believe that it is especially important to assess the communication effectiveness of debaters in situations that employ lay judges.

TABLE I

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

	Number of Contestants	
	Yes	No
Taken a Speech Course In Past	68	26
Forensics Participation	75	19
Debate Participation	49	45

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION, GENERAL FORENSICS AND DEBATE BACKGROUND ON DELIVERY, ANALYSIS AND ORGANIZATION

		Speech Communication Courses			
		N	$\bar{X}$	t value	p value
Analysis	No course background	26	3.62	-1.01	.32
	Course background	68	3.82		
Delivery	No course background	26	3.41	-2.01	.05*
	Course background	68	3.85		
Organized	No course background	26	3.57	-1.67	.10
	Course background	68	3.91		
		Forensics Background			
		N	$\bar{X}$	t value	p value
Analysis	No forensics background	19	3.63	- .76	.45
	Forensics background	75	3.80		
Delivery	No forensics background	19	3.57	- .75	.46
	Forensics background	75	3.77		
Organized	No forensics background	19	3.26	-2.71	.01*
	Forensics background	75	3.96		

TABLE 2 cont.

	Debate Background	N	$\bar{X}$	t value	p value
Analysis	No debate background	45	3.53	-2.33	.02*
	Debate background	49	3.98		
Delivery	No debate background	45	3.30	-3.79	.00*
	Debate background	49	4.08		
Organized	No debate background	45	3.47	-3.83	.00*
	Debate background	49	4.14		

* significant at .05 level

NOTES

[1]See Jack H. Howe, Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results 1973-1974 (Long Beach, California, 1974), 95-98.

[2]Wayne Brockriede, "College Debate and the Reality Gap," Speaker and Gavel, VII (March, 1970), 71; Robert N. Manning, "A Liberal View of Contemporary Debate," Speaker and Gavel, V (May, 1968), 162-164; Robert W. Norton, "A Tournament in the Woods," Journal of the American Forensics Association, VII (Winter, 1971), 245-246; Vernon E. Cronen, "The Function of the Debater: Orator, Critic, Pedagogue," Central States Speech Journal, XX (Winter, 1969), 261-268; Howard Pelham, "The Justification for Debate Must be Expanded," Speaker and Gavel, IX (January, 1972), 45-47.

[3]Brockriede, 71.

[4]See Austin J. Freeley, Argumentation and Debate: Rational Decision Making, 3rd ed. (Belmont, California: 1971), 20-26; Wayne N. Thompson, Modern Argumentation and Debate: Principles and Practices (New York: 1971), 2; Arthur N. Kruger, Modern Debate: Its Logic and Strategy (New York: 1960), 5-6; Glenn R. Capp and Thelma R. Capp, Principles of Argumentation and Debate (Englewoods Cliffs, New Jersey: 1965), 11-14.

[5]Such lists include famous lawyers, politicians, businessmen, etc.

[6]Participant and Administrative Guide (Washington D.C.: Bicentennial Youth Debates, 1975), 1.

[7]Norman H. Nie, et.al., Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, 2nd edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), 272.